1; Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais



tioned this latter instance advanced it as a possible alternative to the custom found elsewhere in Haiti, adding that it was the duty of the living to honor their ancestors, and not for the ancestors to make provision to honor themselves, particularly since the dead can enforce the discharge of this duty by sending illness, bad fortune, and death to those of their descendants who are remiss.

To a very appreciable degree, what is inherited forms the foundation of whatever wealth a man may accumulate during his lifetime. Yet there are few, among the peasants at least, who do not seek by all means to add to their heritage, for among those folk the ambition to obtain more and more land is a dominating one. To this end the peasant skimps and saves, depriving himself even of his important needs, until at the proper time some choice parcel of ground comes on the market.

How does a man go about accumulating the funds necessary to amass property? Ordinarily a young man is given a plot of ground by his father, and the produce, as mentioned, is marketed for him by his mother, who saves the proceeds for him. When he marries, his wife takes over this task, and together the two strive to extract as large earnings as possible from his plot. In addition, a man may take a *job*. Such work, always paid for by the unit rather than by the day or week, is usually that of cultivating a plot of ground for its owner, and the amount agreed upon is paid when the field has been harvested. The young man at the same time can also cultivate his own fields and participate in communal labor. Another way of adding to the earnings of his fields is to help the large landowners on their cotton plantations. This work is paid for in kind with baskets of cotton, which in turn are sold to factors who come from the coast to buy both large and small quantities. A man may also increase his income by working in the cane-fields or at the caldrons when the sirup is boiled. Each

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worker receives about ten gourdes a week, in addition to his food, and the work often is of several months' duration. To do this, however, it is necessary for him to hire another to work his own garden for the period he is thus engaged. As extra money is gradually accumulated, more land is purchased, so that the returns become greater; and the process is accelerated when, upon the death of a man's father, other family land is added to what he already owns.

Thus the drive to obtain property is an obsession with the Haitian peasant. The question of a few centimes, to say nothing of a gourde, is hotly argued; for instance, in the bidding for unclaimed lost animals held periodically at the Mairie in Mirebalais, bids are often raised by as little as five centimes, with the bidder waiting until the last possible moment, the third call of the auctioneer, before pledging the additional sum. Those who have money prefer silver to paper and usually keep it in a trunk at home, but if troublous times impend, the money is put in jars and hidden in the ground. In this way it happens that when a man dies, much of his money is lost to his heirs, for he rarely tells even his wife or children what he has done with it.

Yet this point must be stressed — in the mind of the Haitian peasant, though wealth is desired for the prestige it gives, it is rarely prized for the display it permits. Frequently when a person of large means is pointed out in the market place, he will be simply if not poorly dressed. To make undue display of possessions would arouse envy, and envy brings upon a man's household the evil eye. Wealth is rather manifested in extensive farms, in elaborate ceremonies for the rituals held for family ancestors and for family gods, in the education of children to the end that they may eventually move to the capital and there attain social and political position of importance. Wealth brings prestige to its owner through the word-of-mouth comment of his neighbors, and with this he is content,

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not deeming it necessary to emphasize his position through the conspicuous display of his resources. His children who get to the capital are seldom as prudent, and, as native expression has it, "It takes four generations to achieve the march from the village to the capital, and back to the ancestral village."

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In the Haitian cuisine the prevalence of stews, of dishes fried in deep fat, of the generous use of pepper in seasoning, are all African, as are even the names of certain dishes, such as *acansan*, a Nigerian-Dahomean term which designates the cooked balls of cornmeal. One of the few European intrusions is white bread, while the cassava cakes, also important in native diet, derive from the aboriginal Indian inhabitants.

In its outward forms the economic system under which the Haitian peasant lives seems entirely based upon European pecuniary patterns. Money follows the French system, even to the official use of the French designation, *centimes*, for the smallest parts of the principal unit of currency, the *gourde*. Both paper money and coins are used, and as the result of the Marine occupation American money is as well known as the currency of the country itself. Buying and selling goes on in the accepted European manner, the price of such export crops as cotton, sugar-cane, and coffee responding to the fluctuations of the world market. In many of its inner aspects also, the values of the Haitian are influenced by the money economy taken over from Europe and America.

The conclusion that the economy of Africa has been swept aside by that of Europe needs, nevertheless, to be qualified if certain historical and psychological factors are not to be ignored. It must not be forgotten that in West Africa, long before the period of European contact, a monetary system based on the cowrie shell had been fully developed. The prestige of wealth, the resulting drive to obtain property, the pursuits of buying and selling, and other aspects of a pecuniary civilization were as current in West Africa at the time of slaving, and continue today, as in Europe or in Haiti. When some of the attitudes associated with the economic life are analyzed, it is no simple matter, therefore, to state whether they stem from African or European sources, or both.

One pattern common to both economies, the validation of position through the conspicuous display of resources, has

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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been largely lost in the peasant culture, possibly because of a prudence dictated by conditions of life wherein evidences of the possession of wealth — certainly in the case of a peasant — were an invitation to those who would despoil him. Only when a family of position gives a ceremony, or when one of its members is married or dies, is the lavishness of its preparations such as to suggest the imporance of its place in the community. This does not hold for the individual. Personal ostentation is the more strongly inhibited by the belief that another's envy may bring ill fortune to the one against whom it is directed. In Mirebalais it has almost become a byword that the really substantial citizens look as though they were the poorest. This tradition in no way interferes with the preoccupation with adding to one's possessions, or with the desire to exert the power and enjoy the position that go with a command of large resources, or the will to pass on as large an inheritance as possible to children. In their origin, such drives can be ascribed neither to Europe nor to Africa, nor, for that matter, to the experiences of slavery but rather to the interplay of two homologous patterns of culture that has produced the economic system and the economic motivations found in Haiti today.

In the matter of land tenure, and in attitudes toward private property, African tradition has disintegrated almost completely. Under the characteristic West African form of land tenure, land of a tribe is vested in the tribal head, who allots it to families for use. Trespass upon it is not permitted while it is under active cultivation, and the produce of the land is the property of the one who has worked it. Only palm trees are privately owned by those who have planted them; otherwise land that goes uncultivated for a longer period than is necessary to restore its fertility may be re-allotted. In some regions land worked by an individual is his because of his membership in a large relationship group, whose ownership derives from the power of its ancestors who had lived on this

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3



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When I want to talk you do not want me to talk!
When I want to sing you do not want me to sing!
Dahomey *y ava*, they do me wrong! •

Another note of criticism within the hounfor concerns a person who has been putting on airs of importance. The song states that he (or she) in reality has not even qualified for the lowest order within the cult, even though he behaves as though he were the cult chief:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ou poco hounsi oh! | You are not yet a hounsi, oh! |
| Ou dit'm ou c'est houngan! | You tell me you are a houngan! |
| Ou poco hounsi! | You are not yet a hounsi! |
| Ou dit'm ou c'est houngan c'est ça! | You tell me you are a houngan, it is so! |
| Oh Paille à Terre! | Oh, Straw on Earth! † |
| Poussé allé! | Push and go! |
| Oh Allada malade oh! [Ex. 99] | Oh, Allada is sick, oh! ‡ |

Poverty is so normal in Haitian life that a man who accumulates wealth in any form becomes conspicuous. Ordinarily he does not welcome this conspicuousness. It makes him a target of gossip and rumors, and of those who might wish to collect debts from him, borrow money, or obtain other favors. He becomes a *gros nèg'*, and finds himself increasingly cut off from the community of ordinary, poor people. Needless to say, Haitians, like other people, dream of striking it rich. Wherever poverty has been acute, whether in Europe, Asia, or America, the folklore is full of tales of finding great treasures. Haiti is no exception. Many Haitian folk tales and folk songs deal with this theme, particularly with obtaining wealth by magical or supernatural means. Sometimes riches are obtained through *engagements*, unholy compacts with devils or demons. In some stories loa facilitate the discovery of treasure, in others a powerful bocor accomplishes it through magical practices. If a man suddenly becomes well-to-do, therefore, rumors may spread in regard to how he came by his wealth. If he is suspected of dealings with devils or with a powerful bocor, his apparent success in his venture makes him a neighbor to be feared. To avoid incurring envy and hostility, people tend to play down their financial successes and pretend they have nothing in life but the clothes they wear, their houses, and their gardens. Spreading word that a poor man has hidden money is regarded as a mean and reprehensible act. Numerous folk songs protest against this injustice:

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Désastre tombé nans lacour-wà!
Si m'apé travaille là nans cour-wà,

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• Literally: They eat my rights.

† An exclamation, the name of a certain ounsga.

‡ Allada, the name of a town in Dahomey, used in the sense of "people of Dahomey." The line means, "Things are in a bad state of affairs."

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3



Yo dit'm gainyain largent séré, oh vrai!
Yo mitté conplotaille oh là sou dos moin!
Oh yo mitté conplotaille oh là sou dos moin!
Fai'm payé largent, évo!
Mandé Bondieu pou' nou wè li, so! [Ex. 100]

Disaster descends on my yard!
If I work in the yard there
They say I have hidden money, in truth!
They plot behind my back!
Oh, they plot behind my back!
Make me pay money, *évo!*
I ask God to see it.

Another theme that runs deeply through Haitian life is the need for a mother. In a society where plaçage is normal and where fathers frequently are transient, the mother has been the stabilizing factor in family life. A *placée* family might see the father only at certain times of the year. If he is a farmer, it will usually be when he comes to work his gardens; then he will move on to other gardens and possibly to another family elsewhere. The loss of a mother, under these conditions, is felt very deeply. Many Haitian songs, in various moods, emphasize the role of the mother in the house. Some of them are gay, like this one, with an undercurrent of sadness:

Oh dèpis manman moin fai moin,
M'pas jamais wè manman moin!
Waille waille waille waille!
Waille waille waille waille!
M'pas conné manman moin!
Zandolite fai'm!
Mabouya fai'm!
Zandolite fai'm!
Mabouya fai'm! [Ex. 171]

Oh, since my mother made me,
I've never seen my mother!
*Waille waille waille waille!* *
*Waille waille waille waille!*
I do not know my mother!
A *zandolite* made me!
A *mabouya* made me!
A *zandolite* made me!
A *mabouya* made me!

The *zandolite* and *mabouya* to which the song refers are small lizards which constantly skitter about on the rocks and in the trees, as though they have no home. The metaphor is clear.

One more song on this subject stresses the importance of having a mother as compared, say, to an unreliable man:

Ma crié,
Oh qua'm perdit manman moin ma rélé!
Ma rélé,
Oh qua'm perdit manman moin crié!
Qua'm perd' un garçon moin join' l'aut' oh!

* Exclamation.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3



color predisposed a freedman to separate himself, by marriage with a person at least as light as himself, as far as possible from his slave ancestors.[4]

Aside from paternity, the chief reasons for freeing a slave were faithful or extraordinary service, and the readiness of a master to free his concubine. By the time of the Revolution many of the free colored people had not known slavery in their families for four generations, while still more had been free for two or three. During the century many had acquired wealth by inheritance from former owners. Their close association with well-to-do white planters had instilled in them the desire to improve their economic fortunes as well as their culture; friendly relationships with their benefactors afforded them the opportunity. Like the grands blancs, the prosperous gens de couleur sent their children to Paris for an education, and went there themselves for pleasure.

As the free colored people flourished, so also did the jealousy of the petits blancs against them. "Society" in Saint-Domingue was beset, as is any social system which has not yet the sanctity of long tradition, with heartburnings, intrigues, resentment, snobbery. Petit blanc aspired to become grand blanc; small planter longed to be received into the smart set of the wealthy plantation owners; creole resented the toplofty airs of the recent émigré from France. What was more irksome to the petit blanc than his own exclusion from high society was the acceptance into it of many colored people whose parents or grandparents had been African slaves. Since many of the gens de couleur were better educated and more cultured than the lower-class whites, inner consciousness of mental inferiority may have added fuel to the fires of jealousy.

The growing wealth of free colored people was notable in the latter years of the century. One fertile parish in the South (Jérémie) was almost entirely in their hands, while in every other part of the colony they had bought or inherited handsome plantations. They looked upon Saint-Domingue as their fatherland, not hoping (as did many of the whites) to retire to France to spend their fortunes, nor yearning (as did many slaves) to return to Africa. The less ambitious

4. Certain colonial writers diverted themselves by working out all the mathematical combinations of blood mixture, with names for scores of the commoner varieties. Since people with some part of white blood in their veins might mate with others of their own kind, with lighter or with darker persons, with black or with white, it can be imagined how complicated the question of race mixture might become.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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lishing their freedom from the taint of any black admixture. Having entered white society by such means, and further diluted their Negro blood by judicious marriages, these social climbers frequently became the most pitiless masters of slaves in the colony, the most rigid sticklers for a color line, ruthless enemies of recent freedmen and of those who acknowledged the dark strain in their blood; and having now "passed over" as whites, they snubbed the petits blancs.

The rising tide of color prejudice became apparent in the passage of discriminatory laws. The first of any importance was enacted by the representative Council of the colony, sitting at the capital, Cap Français, in 1758. It prohibited all colored people, except police and militiamen, from carrying swords, sabres, or other side arms—thus denying them one of the outward marks of gentlemen. Four years later the prohibition was extended to the bearing of all firearms, except in service, while in 1767 the sale of munitions to colored persons was forbidden unless ordered by a white officer. Obviously the instigators of prejudice had by this time won a number of ruling grands blancs to the notion that the presence of numerous people of color might constitute a menace to the physical safety of the whites.

Louis XV, the reigning monarch, took no steps to enforce the liberal provisions of the Code Noir of his grandfather; on the contrary, he seems to have favored the passage of discriminatory laws. He made it difficult for colored planters to travel freely in France. The colonial perpetrators of indignities to the gens de couleur, seeing the success of their first efforts, began to propose increasingly severe restrictions, and were gratified by Louis XV's official "Instructions to Administrators" (1771), which stressed the necessity of maintaining a line between the two races which colored people and their descendants might never cross.

For the next two decades the affranchi had to face openly avowed discrimination. One by one his rights in the Code were abrogated. He might not fill any responsible office either in the courts or the militia, for that would elevate him above white persons. Certain careers, such as goldsmithing, were closed to him, because they brought wealth; others, notably medicine and the apothecary's art, were forbidden on the ground that whites might be poisoned;[8] law and religion were barred to him because of their public and honorific

8. It was a common belief in slave colonies that all persons with Negro blood had some "instinctive" knowledge of the science and art of poisoning.

The former affranchis fully intended to keep
38 their lands THE HAITIAN PEOPLE once the
175 French were driven out. They could not but be alarmed as they saw
423 the steady direction of Dessalines' moves toward a complete mo-
425 nopoly of land ownership by the state. On the very day following
471 independence, a decree proclaimed that all lands owned by France in colonial days now belonged to Haiti. Next (February 7, 1804) Dessalines canceled all sales and donations made to mulattoes and ex-slaves by fleeing French who, in a last despairing effort to salvage something from the wreckage of olden days, had "entrusted" their lands to non-whites. By these two strokes all lands owned by white men before 1803 became state property,[5] but only the second clipped the wings of socially ambitious colored people.

175 Serious uneasiness was caused by the next measure, an order for a
421 general verification of property titles. This would have been a deli-
[693] cate task at best, considering the disorder of the past thirteen years. It was made more complicated to carry out by the serious lack of men trained in law. A few like Balthasar Inginac, later an important adviser and trusted friend of two presidents, were scrupulously conscientious, but by the same token highly unpopular with those whom they deprived of newly (and shadily) acquired "estates." The majority of officials, according to report, listened to the pleading of many who had managed by hook or crook to secure a tenuous claim to vacant properties, validating their fraudulent titles for them. It has been claimed, without rebuttal, that most of these officials were not above taking bribes. When complaint was made to Dessalines of such actions he took steps to make his appointees do their duty, but each confiscation made new enemies for Dessalines.

Some of the mulattoes, citing their French paternity, claimed land formerly owned by their French fathers, even though these parents had never regarded their sons as more than bastards. Dessalines once broke out in furious answer to such a claimant: "*Et les pauvres*
175 *nègres dont les pères sont en Afrique, ils n'auront donc rien!*"
425 The state took over thousands of acres. Those Haitians, colored or
556 black, who aspired to landownership as the foundation of position,

[642] [648] 5. The hatred of the Haitians for the French, and because of them, for white people in general, was seen not only in these confiscations but in commitments for the future. A proclamation of April 28, 1804, suppressed to "all foreigners" the right to own property in land. The first Haitian constitution, May 20, 1805, took an even more drastic step in saying that "no white man shall henceforth set foot in this country as a landowner," and that "*all* property formerly belonging to a white Frenchman" was now confiscate to the profit of the state.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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prestige, and the normal fulfillment of dignity, were thus frustrated in their efforts. They began to see that the Emperor intended to withhold from them freedom, room for the exercise of ability or power, fullness of life in whatever form. Not only was there little opportunity for achieving prestige; the repressive and contemptuous attitude of Dessalines denied them even ordinary negative respect, without which dignity of life is impossible.

By confiscation of vacant and falsely claimed estates, Dessalines created a vast public domain. He did not hesitate to secure other lands which he considered valuable, resorting to arbitrary and often cruel means—even, it is said, to forgery and murder—to dispossess those who stood firm in their claims. This attack on private property added other dissidents to his enemies—men who felt themselves clearly in the right legally and morally, men who with clear consciences joined the movement to put down a tyrant. The land thus acquired was leased in parcels at an annual rent to the highest bidders.[6]

The Emperor was blind to the normal human needs of the better elements of the population. He deprived them of property in land, the only basis they knew for wealth and independence; he forbade enterprises undertaken by individual initiative; he continually wounded delicate sensibilities. The Emperor was not a man to spare people's feelings, and he dared use the frank but dangerous words Negro and mulatto. He once shouted to a group of pleaders for position: "*Prenez garde à vous, nègres et mulâtres! Nous avons tous combattu contre les blancs; les biens que nous avons conquis en versant notre sang, appartiennent à nous tous; j'entends qu'ils soient partagés avec équité!*" It was not only Dessalines' idea of "equity" which aroused the *anciens libres* but his use of the descriptive nouns they hated.

The colored people were well aware of the hostility of Dessalines to their group. He was inferior to them in learning, and knew it. He was certainly, by the world's judgment, inferior to them in birth. His very deficiencies by comparison with his colored subjects made him hate them more: for example, he was passionately fond of dancing, preferring compliments on his grace to praise of his statesmanship; yet his awkwardness on the ballroom floor even

6. Although there are no records extant to show the exact amount of land which Dessalines succeeded in bringing into state ownership, it is estimated that more than two thirds of all the productive plantations in Haiti in 1806 were in the hands of the government. Other estimates range as high as ninety per cent.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3



Granted these obvious difficulties, there is still little to be said for the zeal or integrity of churchmen in Saint-Domingue. Father Cabon cites a report to Rome in 1794, which, he remarks, "was not designed to be made public, and does not bear the earmarks of passion," and which flatly states that "since the expulsion of the Jesuits, the curés have for the most part led lives so indecent . . . that the citizens and Negroes have lost all the sentiments of religion which the Jesuits gave them."[3] There had been distinguished churchmen in Saint-Domingue before 1750, authors, scientists, teachers of some note, but none appeared thereafter. The rich French colony was not a bright star in the Catholic crown.

Undeterred by those who might have been their spiritual guides, the white people followed the easy path of self-indulgence. The universal testimony of visitors is that, with a few notable exceptions, immorality and cruelty were daily commonplaces. To make a fortune was the prime ambition of every white man, since money made possible the luxurious enjoyment of this world's goods. Protest against money-making or soft living would have been futile. Administrative agents turned public office to their own profit; judges sold justice to the highest bidder; planters drove their slaves to death; and priests dispensed religious solace for a tidy sum.

The freedmen, who in everything patterned their lives after social leaders in the white planter class, had no more concern for religion than their models. They attended Mass occasionally as a social event, where they might see and be seen. When in the latter days of the colony discriminatory legislation required that colored persons sit in separate parts of the church, most of the affranchis simply refrained from attending Mass: their religious zeal was not so great as to make them submit to the public shame of segregation. In their daily lives, likewise, they followed the example of the white planters in pursuing pleasure rather than sobriety, "culture" rather than religious zeal. Like the whites, they were often licentious in their conduct. When it came their turn to direct affairs of state in free Haiti, there was little interest in spiritual matters among them. The intellectuals of the group paid homage to the liberal philosophers of the century rather than to religious thinkers.

If religion was at a low ebb in the prosperous days of the colony, it almost disappeared in the excitement of the years following the

3. *Ibid.*, p. 33. revolt of the slaves (1791).